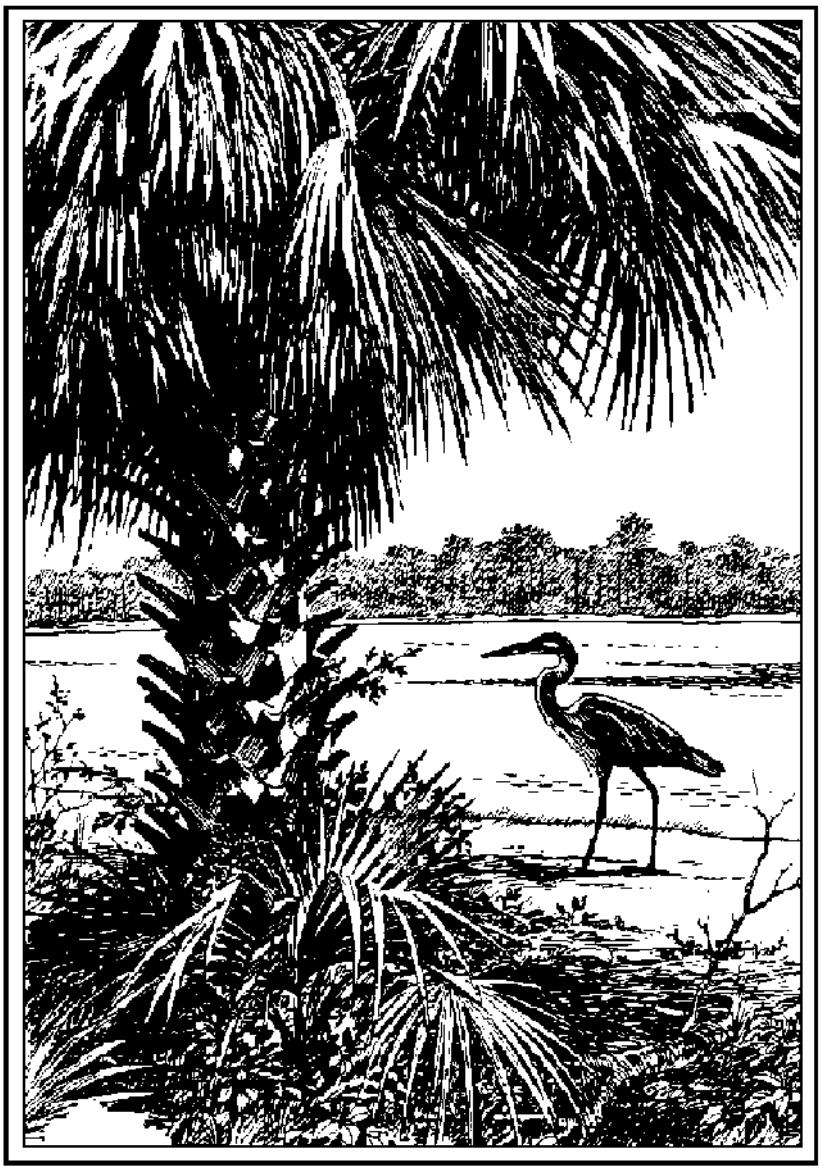
United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service
Southern Region

Record of Decision for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for

National Forests in Florida



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Record of Decision for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for

National Forests in Florida

Apalachicola National Forest (Franklin, Leon, Liberty, and Wakulla Counties)
Choctawhatchee National Forest (Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Walton Counties)
Ocala National Forest (Lake, Marion, and Putnam Counties)
Osceola National Forest (Baker and Columbia Counties)

Responsible Agency:	USDA - Forest Service
Responsible Official:	Elizabeth Estill, Regional Forester USDA - Forest Service, Southern Region 1720 Peachtree Road NW Atlanta GA 33067-9102
For Information Contact:	Marsha Kearney, Forest Supervisor National Forests in Florida 325 John Knox Road, Suite F-100 Tallahassee FL 32303-4160 Telephone: (850) 942-9300

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INTRODUCTION

This document is a public Record of Decision (ROD) that documents my decision and rationale for approving the *Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for National Forests in Florida* (Revised Forest Plan).

> When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.
>
> -Aldo Leopold

From the pine woods and cypress swamps of the panhandle to the Everglades and the Keys, Florida is endowed with a rich natural heritage. The national forests of Florida are a major part of this heritage. Florida's population and visitation continue to grow rapidly, resulting in ever-increasing, and sometimes conflicting, demands on this natural heritage.

Management of the national forests in Florida is based on a cooperative relationship among the many users of the forests, the scientific community, and the Forest Service. I believe this Revised Forest Plan represents a significant step forward in this relationship. This revision of the Forest Plan is based on our evolving understanding of how best to restore, maintain and sustain the ecosystems of the national forests in Florida, while serving public demand for a broad range of uses and products.

We are embracing the concept of adaptive management in the Forest Plan. Some degree of unknowing has to be accepted if we are to progress. Intuition and extrapolation are valued qualities in professional life. There is much to be learned from careful observation, monitoring and research. We do not have to know or prove everything before it becomes a part of our normal operations. Adaptive management is using our scientific knowledge and experience to design management strategies that allow us to progress toward our ecological and socioeconomic objectives as we learn. We will test our assumptions, monitor and make adjustments as we learn from our work.

> To say we don't know enough is to take refuge behind a half-truth and ignore the fact that decisions will be made regardless of the amount of information available.
>
> -Jack Ward Thomas

MY DECISION

I selected Alternative E from *The Final Environmental Impact Statement(FEIS) for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the National Forests in Florida*. By selecting Alternative E, I am also approving the Revised Forest Plan that describes in detail the goals, objectives, standards, guidelines, management area direction, suitable lands and recommendations for Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers for Alternative E.

The Revised Forest Plan balances economic and resource values and recognizes the equal importance of all natural resources, as well as the continued availability of goods and services the public expects from the forest. Although none of the alternatives considered would satisfy everyone completely, Alternative E strikes a balance among competing interests to achieve the maximum net public benefits from forest resources in

an environmentally sensitive manner. I believe the Revised Forest Plan is within the physical and biological capability of the land and that this alternative can be implemented without reducing that capability. I believe that the Revised Forest Plan meets our moral, ethical, and legal obligations to the people and environment that surrounds them. In addition, the plan is responsive to the Forest Service's Natural Resource Agenda. The rate at which the plan will be implemented is based on annual funding actually received by the Forest. This Revised Forest Plan will require higher funding levels in some areas than those currently allocated; however, I believe the management direction changes envisioned in the Revised Forest Plan can be implemented under current budget levels. The attainment of desired conditions in some areas and the associated outputs may be prolonged or reduced if funding is not increased.

This decision applies only to National Forest System lands of *National Forests in Florida*. It does not apply to any other Federal, State, or private lands, although the effects to these lands and the effects of my decision on lands surrounding the forests are considered.

A Forest Plan is part of the long-range resource planning framework established by the Resource Planning Act (RPA). NFMA requires all forests in the National Forest System to develop plans that direct resource management activities on the forests. These plans are to be revised when conditions have changed significantly, or on a 10-to-15 year cycle. The first *Land and Resource Management Plan for National Forests in Florida* was approved in January 1986.

The FEIS and Revised Forest Plan were developed according to the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), it implementing regulations, 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 219, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, 40 CFR 1500- 1508. The FEIS discloses the environmental consequences of the alternative management strategies and how they respond to issues and concerns.

COMPONENTS OF THE DECISION

A Forest Plan establishes a framework for future decision making by outlining a broad, general program for achieving the desired goals, objectives, and future conditions of the forest. A Forest Plan does not contain a commitment to the selection of any specific project and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on the Forest Service's internal operations. However, by applying forestwide management direction, the Forest Plan is implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific activities.

There are six fundamental decisions made in all Forest Plans. These are:

- ***Establishment of forest multiple-use goals and objectives (36 CFR 219.11 (b));***
- ***Establishment of forestwide management requirements (standards and guidelines) (36 CFR 219.13 to 219.27);***

- ***Establishment of management areas and management area direction (management area prescriptions) (36 CFR 219.11 (c));***

- ***Designation of suitable timber land and establishment of the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) of timber. Designation of lands suitable for grazing and browsing. Identification of lands suitable and available for oil and gas leasing. Provision for a broad spectrum of forest and outdoor recreation opportunities. (36 CFR 219.14,219.15, 219,16, 219.20, and 219.210);***

- ***Nonwilderness allocations or recommendations for wilderness and wild and scenic rivers or other special use designations as appropriate (36 CFR 219.17);***

- ***Establishment of monitoring and evaluation requirements (36 CFR 219.11 (d)).***

The decisions I make with this ROD are :

Establishment of forest multiple-use goals and objectives .

These are found in Chapter 2 of the Revised Forest Plan. The goals and objectives focus on achieving the desired future conditions of the forests. The goals focus on direction for ecosystem restoration, conservation of biodiversity, sustainable forest management, maintenance and enhancement of wildlife habitats, providing recreational opportunities and contributing to social and economic health of local communities. The objectives provide specific outcomes for accomplishing the goals.

Establishment of forestwide management requirements .

These are found in Chapter 3 of the Revised Forest Plan. Our objective is to simplify the content of the Revised Forest Plan. Toward that end, we tried to avoid printing standards and guidelines that duplicate laws, policies, Forest Service manual, and Forest Service handbook direction. Standards and guidelines were developed when needed to help achieve the goals and objectives of the Forest Plan. Some people commented that the standards and guidelines were too flexible. I believe that the standards and guidelines provide adequate direction for management, provide for resource protection, and serve to illustrate the intent of the Revised Forest Plan. The Revised Forest Plan is not a cookbook; and I believe some latitude is needed in an adaptive management approach.

Establishment of management areas and management area direction .

These are found in Chapter 4 of the Revised Forest Plan. Land is allocated to 24 different management areas with management prescriptions designed to meet various desired future conditions. These management areas fall under nine general categories: Congressionally Designated Lands; Remote Areas; Research Areas; Special Interest Areas; Recreation Emphasis Areas; Hardwood/Cypress Forest; Longleaf and Slash Pine Forest; Sand pine and Oak Scrub; and Special Administration. In some areas, such as

wilderness, legal boundaries are specified by congressional acts. In others, boundaries are identified using ecological units, administrative boundaries, or other physical features.

Designation of suitable timber land and establishment of the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) of timber. Designation of lands suitable for grazing and browsing. Identification of lands suitable and available for oil and gas leasing. Provision for a broad spectrum of forest and outdoor recreation opportunities.

The designation of suitable timber land is found in Chapter 4 and Appendix B of the Revised Forest Plan. Approximately 55 percent (633,337 acres) of the land is designated suitable for timber production. The ASQ is found in Chapter 3 of the Revised Forest Plan. The Revised Forest Plan projects an ASQ of 103 MMCF (million cubic feet) in the next 10 years. At present budget levels and with the projected increase in operational costs, this ASQ may not be attainable without additional funds or reallocation of funding. I am designating 55,198 acres suitable for grazing. I am not making the ``lands available for leasing decision'' or the ``leasing decision'' due to low potential for oil and gas occurrences and the lack of industry interest. If either of these situations change, the Forest Service will conduct the environmental analysis and documentation required to reach a decision (36 CFR 228E). Management area allocations include provisions for recreation opportunities ranging from primitive-nonmotorized to developed recreation areas.

Nonwilderness allocations or recommendations for wilderness and wild and scenic rivers or other special use designations as appropriate

These recommendations are found in Chapter 4 of the Revised Forest Plan. I am recommending the Clear Lake wilderness study area on the Apalachicola NF be designated as wilderness. This will increase the total wilderness to 80,194 acres. New River and Ochlockonee River on the Apalachicola NF and Alexander Springs Creek and Juniper Creek on the Ocala NF are recommended as wild and scenic rivers. I am also recommending that Natural Area on the Osceola NF be released as a wilderness study area. I am allocating 36,021 acres as remote areas, research areas or special interest areas.

Establishment of monitoring and evaluation requirements .

These are found in Chapter 5 of the Revised Forest Plan. Specific monitoring questions are identified and directly linked to Revised Forest Plan goals, desired future conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, and specific regulatory requirements. These requirements ensure that my approach is adaptive and sustainability is being achieved or adjustments made.

Additional Decisions

Also, I am modifying portions of the following Regional directions for the *National Forests in Florida*:

Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact for Standards and Guidelines for the Southern Regional Guide (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, June 1984)

The Revised Forest Plan allows a wider range of stocking levels for longleaf, slash, and sand pine (see Forestwide Standard VG-21, Revised Plan).

Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Management of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and its Habitat on National Forests in the Southern Region (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, June 1995)

The Revised Forest Plan allows reduced foraging requirements on the Apalachicola Ranger District (RD), modifies thinning guides in red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) habitat management areas (HMAs), and permits some latitude in applying age class restrictions for irregular shelterwood harvest in slash pine (see Forestwide Standards WL-1,2,3, Revised Plan).

Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for Vegetation Management in the Coastal Plain/Piedmont (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, February 1989)

The Revised Forest Plan allows growing-season burns on the same site without timing restrictions (see Forestwide Standard FI-6, Revised Plan).

Direction is included in the Forestwide Standards and Guidelines (Plan, page 3-26) which clarifies the appropriate methods of project level inventory/surveys for TES species when conducting biological evaluations. This is a change in language found on page A-1, Section I. A. (2) of the Vegetation Management Record of Decision

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

Public views have played a key role in shaping the Revised Forest Plan. We asked, we listened, we evaluated, and we tested the concepts. Formal activities included printing a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement, an initial issue identification process, a formal public comment period on the *Draft Environmental Impact Statement* (DEIS) *and a Proposed Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for National Forests in Florida* (January 1997), numerous public meetings, presentations, and informational distributions. In addition to formal activities, the Forest Service employees informally explained the purpose of a Forest Plan and how to participate effectively in the process

I approached my decision by looking at the issues and public comments, and then comparing the consequences of various alternatives. The issues identified through public involvement are summarized in the following questions, which were used to develop alternatives for the Forest Plan revision.

1. How much and by what methods should the longleaf pine-wiregrass community be restored and maintained?

2. How should we maintain the sand pine-scrub oak community?

3. How should we manage and protect riparian and wetland areas?

4. How should special aquatic, botanic, geologic, historic, paleontologic, and scenic areas be protected and managed?
5. What lands should be recommended as wilderness, and what practices should be permitted in these areas?
6. What types, amounts, and mix of recreational opportunities should be provided, and what consideration should be given to compatibility of users?
7. What should be the access policy for motorized vehicles?
8. What is the proper combination of open and closed roads to meet public needs?
9. How should we manage habitat to enhance certain wildlife populations—such as game and proposed, endangered, threatened, and sensitive species?
10. What will be the level of timber harvest, and what silvicultural systems will be used to manage the forests?
11. What other types of forest products will be gathered, and what uses will be permitted on the national forests?

In addition to the planning issues and public comments I considered several other factors in making my decision, including:

- Is the alternative consistent with applicable laws, policies, manual, and handbook direction that govern the development of a Forest Plan and management of national forest lands?
- How the alternative provides for the protection of the basic resources (air, soil, and water).
- How the alternative addresses maintenance, restoration, and sustainability of ecosystem composition, structure, and function.
- How the alternative conserves elements of diversity such as declining natural communities and uncommon biological, geological, or ecological sites.
- How the alternative promotes rural economic development and a quality rural environment.
- What are the effects of the alternative on the people who use and depend on forest resources?
- Is the alternative consistent with plans and policies of other government agencies (local, State, and National)?
- How the alternative provides for protection and the recovery of threatened, endangered, or sensitive plant and animal species.
- How operational and budget needs will affect implementation of the alternative.

My rationale for the decision is discussed below under the significant revision topics.

Longleaf Pine-Wiregrass Community Restoration and Maintenance

A key issue that emerged during the revision process focused on biodiversity as it relates to the distribution and mix of vegetative communities on the forests. Of particular interest were natural communities that have been declining across the south, such as the longleaf pine-wiregrass community. These communities have been strongly modified by human activities in the last century and have declined to less than 5 percent of their original acreage across all ownerships. Longleaf pine acres have been reduced in Florida by 22 percent since 1987. Equally important is the loss of wildlife and fire-adaptive grasses and shrubs that are key components of the longleaf pine ecosystem.

I believe that 18,000-20,000 acres of National Forest System (NFS) land that (1) presently is growing slash pine on sites that in the past grew longleaf pine, and (2) sand pine that is extensively encroaching onto longleaf sites should be restored to longleaf pine-wiregrass community to reestablish, conserve, and protect this important community. We will use site-specific analysis to select which NFS land to restore and how this restoration will occur. The regeneration methods considered will include even-aged, two-aged and/or uneven-aged. I anticipate that the regeneration method of clearcutting will be selected for many sites based on the best available science.

The second restoration strategy is restoring fire's historic role in the longleaf pine-wiregrass community by increasing the prescribed burning intervals and burning more acres during the growing season. I have set an ambitious but achievable objective of prescribed burning approximately 158,000 acres per year.

To implement this strategy for longleaf pine-wiregrass restoration and maintenance, the following Southern Region direction was reviewed (1) in light of new science and knowledge obtained since the documents were published, and (2) results of monitoring and evaluations of restoration practices implemented under the past Plan. These reviews showed us that some of the standards and guidelines need expanding to better accomplish the restoration work.

> *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for Vegetation Management in the Coastal Plain/Piedmont* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, February 1989)
>
> > Standards and Guidelines - FI-6 deviates from the Record of Decision by allowing growing-season burns on the same site without timing restrictions.

Growing-season prescribed burning has proven to be critical for recovery of threatened and endangered plant species. In addition, wiregrass—a cornerstone of the longleaf pine-wiregrass ecosystem—has been shown to flower only when burned from April to July. The success of restoring this key component of the ecosystem depends on continued burning during the growing season.

Any growing-season (or dormant-season) burn can lead to small pockets of trees dying, but experience has proven this to be much less of a problem than originally anticipated when the *Final Environmental Impact Statement for Vegetation Management in the Coastal Plain/Piedmont* was issued.

The intent for the original prohibition on more than two consecutive growing-season burns was tied to loss of growth for timber production. While some reduction in growth may occur, the critical need for growing-season fire for overall ecosystem management greatly outweighs any minor losses in timber growth.

> *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact for Standards and Guidelines for the Southern Regional Guide* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, June 1984)
>
> > Standards and Guidelines - VG-21 deviates from Regional Stocking Guides to include a wider range of stocking levels for longleaf, slash, and sand pine.

The stocking levels for longleaf pine changed from a range of 600-1,200 trees/acre to 200-1,200 trees/acre. The stocking level for slash pine changed from 300-900 trees/acre to 250-900 trees/acre. The stocking levels for sand pine changed from 300-900 trees/ acre to 200-1,500 trees/acre. Accepting a wider range of stocking densities would provide a wider range of microhabitats than does a direction to manage all stands for a given target density. Stocking levels tend not to favor sparse stands, so species that use the more open stages of stand development have less favorable conditions. Utilizing a higher proportion of natural regeneration and accepting a wider range of stocking densities would provide a wider range of conditions and diverse habitats and still provide for future production of forest products.

National Forests in Florida lies within a region characterized by a mosaic of areas devoted to agriculture and industrial forestry. Pine plantations account for almost one-third of Florida's timberland, the highest of any Southern state. Natural pine stands represent about 19 percent of Florida's timberland. National forests account for 22 percent of the natural pine acres more than 50 years old in Florida. On *National Forests in Florida*, 38 percent of the longleaf and slash pine and 16 percent of all timberland are less than 30 years old. Most of these acres are in plantations. Different interpretations exist concerning the natural condition of these forests. There is no scientific consensus on this condition. Taken together, sources paint a picture of an open, airy pine forest with an understory of grasses with occasional dense patches of poles and saplings.

My decision includes a Plan objective for 1,800 acres of irregular shelterwood harvest (also called shelterwood with reserves) and 32,500 acres of group selection harvest. Irregular shelterwood would be used in slash pine forest types. Group selection would be used in predominately in longleaf pine, but some will be used in slash pine. Most of these regeneration methods would occur on the Apalachicola NF.

Use of the group selection regeneration method is based mostly on research performed by the Southern Research Station at the Escambia Experimental Forest in southern Alabama. This research found no serious problem to suggest that natural stands of longleaf pine on longleaf pine/bluestem sites on the rolling lower Gulf Coastal Plain cannot be managed and sustained under a group selection system. For longleaf this system requires regular

burning for the purposes of seed-bed preparation, unwanted vegetation control, and hazard reduction. The group selection regeneration method has been implemented on the Apalachicola NF but, to date, has not had widespread use on the National Forests in Florida.

Because of the above referenced successful research at the Escambia Experimental Forest I believe group selection is ecologically sound for longleaf pine. Even though no group selection research has been done in slash pine forests, we plan to adapt the longleaf research tested group selection in some slash pine areas. I believe the group selection regeneration method will provide a more diverse patch size structure and provide a scenic and diverse landscape on National Forest land while simultaneously contributing toward increasing landscape diversity. The planned group selection will not maximize production of wood, but will permit, in the next two decades, some increase of sawtimber production over that produced in the past 5 years as we strive to maintain a sustainable population of Red Cockaded woodpeckers. Group selection implementation costs are expected to be higher than those associated with even-aged or two-aged regeneration methods. However, with an increase of production of sawtimber products revenues should increase over that obtained in the past 5 years.

Recognizing that successful management of the group selection for a few years does not prove that it will accomplish our Forest Plan's goals and objectives, I plan to closely monitor its progress. The monitoring will occur over the next several decades. Southern Research Station researchers will be consulted, particularly with the validation monitoring as part of my goals for an adaptive plan with adjustments being made as information warrants. Emphasis will be placed on monitoring to measure assumptions regarding uneven-aged management in sustaining desired composition and structure of longleaf pine ecosystems and associated plant and animal species.

Because of this, I believe that group selection and irregular shelterwood are regeneration methods that will meet our goals of increasing diversity of stand structures across the forest and maintaining or restoring viable populations all native species with special emphasis on rare species. Simultaneously, I believe these regeneration methods will provide a sustainable longleaf-wiregrass community that produces desirable and sustainable wildlife habitat, diverse scenic forest views, and products and services to our society.

My decision also includes a Revised Forest Plan objective to thin between 45,000 and 55,000 acres of longleaf and slash pine. I believe this is an appropriate level to maintain health of the pine growing stock, release overcrowded pine crowns, increase stand growth, and increase suitable habitat for red-cockaded woodpeckers.

I believe this management prescription best fulfills national forests' role in ecosystem management, maintaining and restoring ecosystem health, providing for biodiversity, and providing a sustained yield of high-quality forest products.

Red-cockaded Woodpecker Habitat Management

The standards and guidelines the Forest Service follows to protect red-cockaded woodpeckers and their habitat are found in the *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Management of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and its Habitat on National Forests in the Southern Region (*RCW EIS). The Revised Forest Plan incorporates these standards and guidelines by reference. The basic strategy is to provide old pine trees that are suitable for nesting cavities, mature pine forests with little midstory suitable for foraging, and enough of each to maintain a healthy population. Any less restrictive deviations from these standards require concurrence with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Most of the longleaf and slash pine forest types on *National Forests in Florida* are within RCW HMAs, and the forest management strategy is guided by the RCW EIS. Application of Regional RCW standards to the current age class distribution on the forests does not allow for even-aged regeneration within RCW HMAs, except for longleaf pine restoration. Uneven-aged management (group selection harvest) has no acreage or age class restrictions. I am modifying these standards for *National Forests in Florida* to allow for some application and testing of the irregular shelterwood harvest (an even-aged method) in slash pine. I am also modifying the RCW-foraging guidelines on the Apalachicola RD to allow for a wider application of group selection harvest. The monitoring direction in my decision will ensure that timely adjustments are made as needed.

The Revised Forest Plan has a 10-year objective of 945 active clusters and a long-term population objective of 1,611 active clusters. These population objectives are based on a detailed look at the distribution of the current active clusters and the pine and pine/hardwood forest type acres that can be reasonably managed as RCW habitat in the future.

The RCW population objectives are based on the allocation of HMAs. The entire Apalachicola NF is within RCW HMAs. On the Ocala NF, RCW HMAs will include Kerr Island, the Paisley area, Riverside Island, and Salt Springs Island. The remainder of the longleaf/slash pine forest will not be included in RCW HMAs. The west-central RCW HMA would not be included because there has not been an active cluster since 1989, and the habitat is highly fragmented with unsuitable habitat and private property making management, especially prescribed burning, prohibitive.

Most of the Osceola NF will be within the RCW HMA (MAs 7.1 and 7.2). A portion of Pinhook Swamp will not be within the RCW HMA (MA 7.3). The Pinhook area would not be included in the RCW HMA, because there are no known RCW cluster occurrences and habitat condition of young plantations interspersed in swamps are unsuitable for RCWs.

I am modifying Regional RCW direction as follows:

> *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Management of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and its Habitat on National Forests in the Southern Region* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, June 1995)

Standards and Guidelines - WL-1 deviates from the Record of Decision by reducing foraging requirements on the Apalachicola RD.

On the Apalachicola RD, the foraging habitat for RCW will be changed to provide a minimum 4,100 pine stems > 10-inch diameter at breast height (DBH) and at least 30 years old and provide a minimum of 5,500 sq. ft. of pine basal area (BA) > 5-inch DBH.

This change will provide for more flexibility in forest management practices such as thinning, group selection, and longleaf pine restoration. The RCW population on the Apalachicola RD is the largest in the world and sources indicate the population is either stable or increasing. Several sources suggest that a reduction in the current foraging standards for RCWs will not adversely affect the RCWs on the Apalachicola RD. However, no study currently puts a definitive number on the required foraging habitat for RCWs on the Apalachicola RD. The foraging standards proposed for the subpopulation on the Apalachicola RD are based on the median numbers of pine stems > 10-inch DBH and amount of pine basal area available at 41 active clusters studied on the Apalachicola RD. This number provides a reduction in the foraging standard while still maintaining habitat conditions at or above what was known to exist on half of the clusters in the study. We will monitor the RCW clusters potentially affected by timber harvests using the reduced foraging guidelines. Timber harvesting under the new standards will cease, and Section 7 consultation will be initiated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service if monitoring indicates a difference in RCW variables when comparing RCW groups associated with timber harvest utilizing the reduced foraging guidelines and RCW groups that are unaffected by the new foraging standards.

Standards and Guidelines - WL-2 permits thinning below minimal levels established in the Record of Decision.

On *National Forests in Florida,* stands within foraging habitat that average greater than or equal to 10 DBH and are not considered uneven-aged should be maintained with an average pine basal area of 60-110 square feet. This is 10 square feet below the 70 BA minimum the RCW EIS guidelines set for maintaining pine stands.

Thinning dense pine stands provides a more open condition, which RCWs prefer. Pine stands on the forests are naturally sparse and are generally considered well stocked if above 80 or 90 BA. The majority of the stands that would fall under this guideline would be pine plantations that are of foraging age and size but were not previously thinned. A small number of these stands will be dense second growth stands of longleaf or slash pine. Observations by field personnel indicate that RCWs tend to avoid these denser stands.

Standards and Guidelines - WL-3 deviates from the Record of Decision by exceeding the even-aged harvesting restrictions in the next 10 years by allowing irregular shelterwood harvest in slash pine of up to 1,000 acres on the Apalachicola RD, 500 acres on the Wakulla RD, and 300 acres on the Osceola RD.

This translates to approximately 150 acres/year on the Apalachicola NF and 30 acres/year on the Osceola NF. Irregular shelterwood has not been applied on *National Forests in Florida*. To implement testing this method in an even flow during the planning period it

will be necessary to exceed the 0-10 age class distribution guide in the RCW EIS during the early years of Forest Plan implementation. I have reviewed this with the USFWS and they have given their concurrence specific to this situation. However, the 0-10 year age class will be at or below the allowable percentage at the end of the first decade after Forest Plan implementation.

Most of the allowable acres in the 0-10 age class will be provided in longleaf pine restoration areas which would be accomplished by clearcutting off-site species and planting longleaf pine. Application of the irregular shelterwood method will allow for all harvest methods to be considered at the project level specific to local conditions.

Sand Pine-Scrub Oak Community Maintenance

The sand pine-scrub ecosystem was historically regenerated by catastrophic stand-replacing fires. Without this type of disturbance, this community moves toward a xeric hardwood hammock type with the scrub oaks gradually becoming dominant and eventually shading out many endemic plant species. Sand pine is a short-lived species which provides the fuel for the system. Once it is gone, the scrub oaks have a low likelihood of ignition.

Many of the species endemic to the scrub, including several federally listed species, are dependent on the early successional habitat that was created by these large fires. Because of the extensive interface with private land throughout the forests, the large number of acres that need to be treated to maintain early successional scrub habitat, and the catastrophic nature of scrub fires, large-scale fires are too dangerous to be used for habitat management. Clearcutting sand pine scrub appears to mimic these stand-replacing fires and would be done in all alternatives. Scrub-jays, sand skinks, and other species associated with early successional scrub habitat have in the past responded favorably to the habitat created by clearcutting sand pine scrub.

The objectives for sand pine harvest and scrub-jay populations are closely related. I believe that 40,000 acres is a harvest level that will provide an adequate level of early successional scrub habitat and provide a sustainable flow of forest products from the forests. This would provide for 45,000 to 55,000 acres of habitat capable of supporting between 742 and 907 scrub-jay groups. A high priority will be given to study and monitor our management in the scrub and the effects on the dispersal, reproduction, mortality, and survival of scrub-jays on the forest. Consistent with the adaptive management approach, sand pine scrub management will be implemented under a variety of prescriptions, which follow.

A large portion of the Ancient Island scrub will be designated management area (MA) 8.1. The Ancient Island has a high concentration of rare endemic species that require early successional scrub habitat. This area would be managed similar to the rest of the scrub except natural regeneration will be emphasized and maximum opening size will be up to 320 acres. This will provide habitat for species that utilize large areas of early successional scrub habitat, like scrub-jays and American kestrel.

Most of the sand pine scrub forest will be managed with a maximum clearcut size of 160 acres and natural regeneration would be encouraged (MA 8.2). Naturally regenerated

sand pine stands can range in density from very sparse to very thick. Artificial seeding and stocking guides for forest management practices tends to favor thick, homogenous stands. Utilizing a higher proportion of natural regeneration and accepting a wider range of stocking densities would provide a wider range of conditions and diverse habitats and still provide opportunities for future timber production.

One area will be designated as a scrub-jay management area (MA 8.4). This area will first be clearcut when the existing stands become merchantable at about 35 years old. Then it will be kept in early scrub oak by the use of prescribed fire. This area will provide habitat for numerous scrub-jay families. This will allow for a large amount of interaction between family groups. Two other areas would likely be maintained in young oak, these are the Pinecastle Bombing Range and the scrub portions of the scrub habitat in Juniper Prairie Wilderness. The Pinecastle Bombing Range has fires ignited at intervals frequent enough to maintain about 5,500 acres of the area in young scrub oak that is suitable for scrub-jays. Juniper Prairie Wilderness also has been recently receiving natural ignitions that would maintain about 8,900 acres in young scrub oak that would be suitable for scrub-jays.

In order to implement these strategies for sand pine-scrub oak regeneration, I am modifying the following Regional direction:

> *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact for Standards and Guidelines for the Southern Regional Guide* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, June 1984)
>
> > Standards and Guidelines - 8.1-3 and 8.2-3 deviate from the Regional guide for regeneration harvest size for sand pine.

In sand pine scrub, the maximum clearcut size will be raised from 120 acres to 320 acres in MA 8.1 and 160 acres in MA 8.2. When the Forest Service began clearcutting, clearcut sizes were 200 acres or more. In response to public comment about the appearance of clearcuts, the average size has been reduced to less than 40 acre, but ecologists' concern for the threatened Florida scrub-jay has raised the concerns about the loss of habitat.

The larger size of these clearcuts is intended to shift the treatment size toward a size that more closely replicates the catastrophic stand-replacing fire that historically occurred in this community. These larger cuts would benefit scrub-jays by allowing for numerous family groups to inhabit a single newly created opening. This would allow for interaction between more scrub-jay groups than is possible with the currently allowed opening size. I realize that the use of clearcutting is a very sensitive and emotional issue. In response to public concerns, the agency has committed itself to reducing it's use to only the most essential situation. I believe that this situation warrants it's use and it represents the best science related to scrub jay and it's habitat. Scrub jay population demographics, reproduction and dispersal will be closely monitored along with the management strategies in the sand pine scrub.

Protection of Wetlands and Riparian Areas

National forests contain about 150,000 acres, or 4 percent of Florida's hardwood acreage. Most of these areas are cypress swamps and hardwood bottomlands. The disturbance

regimes of these areas are usually low-intensity, small scale events, causing the loss of single trees. However, areas near the coast are sometimes subject to large scale events such as hurricanes.

Since 1987, hardwood removals have increased 33 percent in Florida. Two-thirds of the hardwood removals came from lowland hardwood stands. The most recent forest survey in Florida showed that net annual removals exceed net annual growth in cypress, although statewide, hardwood growth exceeds removals by 83 percent.

Many of these areas serve vital ecological roles as water control and purification, groundwater recharge, and soil enrichment. Common uses in these areas include recreational activities such as boating, fishing, hiking, hunting, and swimming. These areas also serve as wildlife travel corridors and linkages.

The swamps and bottomlands rarely have been subject to timber activity on *National Forests in Florida.* There are few roads into these areas, and roading would be difficult and costly. While the technology is available to harvest cypress and bottomland hardwoods without undue harm to soil and water quality, I believe that these land's ecological, recreational, and scenic values outweigh the present need for timber production.

Because of these other values, hardwood stands would be unsuitable for timber production on the national forests in Florida. On the Ocala NF, the bottomlands of the St. Johns and Ocklawaha Rivers will be managed as hardwood/cypress, no timber production (MA 5.1). Along the bottomlands of these rivers, the harvesting of hardwood and cypress will not be allowed. This will result in these areas retaining their scenic qualities and enhancing dispersed recreation in these areas. Pine stands along the margins and on ridges within these areas will be suitable for timber production.

Management of Areas with Special Natural, Scenic, or Other Values

The Revised Forest Plan makes the following special management area allocations.

1.0 Remote Areas

These areas are predominantly remote wetlands.

On the Osceola NF, a portion of Pinhook will be managed as a remote wetland (MA 1.1). This area has been added to the roadless area inventory and will provide habitat for species requiring large, remote, undisturbed areas. This area also provides a linkage between the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge and the Osceola NF.

2.0 Research Areas

These areas include research natural areas (RNAs), experimental forests, and genetic resource management areas.

The Savannah RNA on the Apalachicola NF will continue as currently managed (MA 2.1). It was proposed in the DEIS for the Forest Plan to expand the Savannah RNA. I

have decided that the restoration and maintenance of the savannahs surrounding the RNA can be better accomplished by allocating the savannahs as special interest areas (MA 3.1). I am including the entire compartment that surrounds the Savannah RNA as a special interest area.
Natural Area RNA (MA 2.1) on the Osceola NF will continue as currently managed, except that prescribed fire may be applied to portions of the area to mimic natural forces.

On the Osceola NF, the Experimental Forest (MA 2.2) will continue as currently managed. This area will provide lands for conducting research to achieve goals and objectives of the Southern Research Station.

On the Ocala NF, the Genetic Resource Management Area (MA 2.3) will provide land for conducting research that serves as a basis for genetic conservation and propagation of sand pine and for genetic conservation of threatened, endangered, and sensitive plant species.

3.0 Special Interest Areas

These areas have special aquatic, biotic, geologic, historic, paleontologic, or scenic value.

On the Apalachicola NF, all savannahs outside the Savannah RNA, Bradwell Tract, and Lake Bradford Tract will be added as special interest areas (MA 3.1). Leon Sinks, Morrison Hammock, River Sinks, and Rocky Bluff will continue to be managed as special interest areas (MA 3.1).

On the Ocala NF, Bowers Bluff, Davenport Landing, Lake Charles, Mormon Branch (with the eastern part removed), Mud Lake, and Redwater Lake (enlarged) will continue to be managed as special interest areas (MA 3.1). Disappearing Creek and North Prairie will be added as special interest areas (MA 3.1). Alexander Springs Scenic Area will be managed as moderate recreational development (MA 4.4). Blackwater Swamp will be managed as low recreational development (MA 4.3).

On the Osceola NF, Fanny Bay, Drew Grade Oak Hammock, and the lower part of the Middle Prong of the St. Mary's River will be added as special interest areas (MA 3.1).

This will increase the total area managed as special interest areas and ensure the values of these areas can be preserved and interpreted for public enjoyment, study, and use.

9.0 Special Administration

These are areas with special administrative conditions such as the Pinecastle Bombing Range, the urban interface, and small tracts of land administered by the Forest Service on Eglin Air Force Base.

A forest/urban interface area (MA 9.2) will be designated on the east side of the Apalachicola NF. This area will provide a high level of opportunities for motorized and nonmotorized recreation.

The Pinecastle Bombing Range (MA 9.1) on the Ocala NF will continue under current management direction pending completion of a site-specific EIS prepared jointly by the U.S. Department of Navy and the Forest Service.

Lands of the Choctawhatchee NF (MA 9.3) will be managed at a custodial level. Because these lands consist of isolated, small parcels, they are considered for exchange. This area is managed under a Memorandum of Understanding with Eglin Air Force Base.

Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas

There are seven designated wilderness areas containing 74,551 acres and two designated wilderness study areas (WSAs) containing 10,035 acres within *National Forests in Florida.*

The current practical maximum capacity for wilderness on *National Forests in Florida* is estimated to be 161,403 recreation visitor-days (RVDs) per year. Thus, even with a projected demand of 41,788 RVDs by the year 2020, *National Forests in Florida* has the ability to meet the demand for wilderness. A gap analysis was conducted for cities with more than a 50,000 population that are within 250 miles of a national forest wilderness in Florida. No gap exists, and all cities with more than a 50,000 population have access to a wilderness area.

In selecting Alternative E, I am recommending the 5,635 acre Clear Lake WSA be designated as wilderness. The addition of a wilderness area near the population center of Tallahassee would provide more opportunities for visitors to experience wilderness. Adding Clear Lake to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) would result in the inclusion of an ecosystem (longleaf pine) not currently represented in the system. On a national scale, this would help to ``round out" the NWPS and ensure that a representative sample of this ecosystem is protected.

I am not recommending Natural Area WSA on the Osceola NF for wilderness status. This WSA has limited wilderness character because of existing roads and evidence of previous timber harvest. The section of this WSA that shows the least evidence of disturbance from logging and other management activities is already protected by RNA status. Also, examples of similar ecosystems are included in nearby wilderness areas, including the Okefenokee Swamp, just north of the Osceola NF.

On the Apalachicola NF, Bradwell Bay Wilderness will continue to be managed as wilderness with trails (MA 0.2).

On the Ocala NF, Juniper Prairie Wilderness and Alexander Springs Wilderness will remain as wilderness with trails (MA 0.2). Juniper Prairie Wilderness will be recommended for expansion along the eastern boundary to State Highway 19, but a narrow corridor which includes Sweetwater Cabin will be excluded.

Mud Swamp/New River Wilderness on the Apalachicola NF and Little Lake George Wilderness and Billies Bay Wilderness on the Ocala NF will be managed as trailless wilderness (MA 0.1). Since these areas currently have no designated trails, except the New River canoe trail, there would be little effect. Marked and maintained trails for

canoeing, hiking, or horseback riding would not exist, although these activities could still occur in these areas on game trails and old woods roads. Those seeking challenge and risk would find increased opportunities, as well as more solitude.

Roadless Areas

National Forests in Florida has 14 inventoried roadless areas (RARE II), plus an area on the Osceola NF called Pinhook Swamp. Pinhook Swamp was evaluated as a roadless area for this Forest Plan revision**.** These areas have a combined total of 99,686 acres. Although these areas are referred to as roadless areas, some of them do contain roads as permitted in FSH 1909.12, *Land and Resource Management Planning Handbook.*

Each roadless area was evaluated for its wilderness potential, using a report format in accord with CFR 219.17 (*see* Appendix C, ``Evaluation of RARE II Areas"). Six roadless areas are dropped from the Roadless Area Inventory because they no longer contain the roadless characteristics necessary for inclusion. All six areas, especially Baptist Lake and Buck Lake, exceed the amount of roads allowed for their size. In addition, the influence of State Highway 65 and the railroad on the four areas on the Apalachicola NF reduces the opportunities to escape the sights and sounds of civilization. The existence of numerous timber sales also contributes to the evidence of human disturbance.

Five of the nine roadless areas retained on the Roadless Area Inventory would have proposed boundary changes (*see* FEIS, Roadless Area Inventory maps). These proposed changes are intended to carve out segments of the areas that have more roads than the criteria allows, or to add in further adjacent areas with truly roadless character. Six of the nine areas retained on the Roadless Area Inventory are allocated to management areas unsuitable for timber production. Table 1 shows the allocation of roadless areas to each management area.

Table 1

Management Area Allocation of Roadless Areas

Roadless Area	Management Area	Acreage
Alexander Springs Scenic Area	4.4	4,237
Baptist Lake	8.2	8,525
Bay Creek	7.1	5,645
Black Creek Islands	7.1	8,560
Buck Lake	8.2	5,680
Clear Lake WSA	0.2	5,635
Farles Prairie	4.2	2,467
Gum Bay	7.1	9,180
Impassable Bay	4.2	5,670
Long Bay	7.1	8,084
Natural Area WSA	7.1	4,400
Pinhook Swamp	1.1	15,403
Post Office Bay	7.1	7,280
Providence	7.1	6,885
Savannah	2.1	1,945

Wild and Scenic Rivers

National Forests in Florida currently has no rivers included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The *Final Environmental Impact Statement and Wild and Scenic River Study Report* for the Sopchoppy River, located in the Apalachicola NF, has been completed and has recommended designation of the river study corridor.
Additionally, in the context of the Revised Forest Plan, the four other rivers listed previously have been studied as to their eligibility, suitability, and potential classification (*see* FEIS, Appendix D, ``Wild and Scenic Rivers''). New River and Ochlockonee River on the Apalachicola NF and Alexander Springs Creek and Juniper Creek on the Ocala NF will be recommended as wild and scenic rivers (MA 0.3). These studies will be forwarded to the Secretary of Agriculture for submission to Congress. Until a final decision is made by Congress, the Forest Service will protect those qualities that made these rivers eligible.

Economic and social benefits of having a wild and scenic river would accrue to the counties where these rivers are located. There would be some increase to the local economy as people travel to the area to canoe or recreate on a designated wild and scenic river. Since Florida currently has only one National Wild and Scenic River, the Loxahatchee River, some prestige would accrue to the state as a whole from the standpoint of having rivers in a near-pristine or natural state, and add to the list of state attractions. The characteristics and values of the rivers would be protected. In the scenic and recreational segments, a range of forest activities would be permitted, including timber harvesting where needed to address the outstandingly remarkable values that caused the river to be designated, with resulting public benefits.

Recreation

For the purpose of land allocation for developed recreation, only the large, highly developed areas are allocated to the developed recreation management area (MA 4.5). Smaller, less developed areas are not allocated under a separate management area, but occur as inclusions within larger management areas, if they are compatible with the desired future condition (DFC) of the area. The following areas will be allocated to MA 4.5:

Apalachicola NF—Camel Lake, Cotton Landing, Fort Gadsden, Hickory Landing, Hitchcock Landing, Lost Lake, Mack Landing, Porter Lake, Silver Lake, Trout Pond, Whitehead Lake, Wood Lake, and Wright Lake

Ocala NF—Alexander Springs, Big Bass Lake, Big Scrub, Buck Lake, Clearwater Lake, Farles Lake, Fore Lake, Grassy Pond, Hopkins Prairie, Juniper Springs, Lake Catherine, Lake Delancy, Lake Dorr, Lake Eaton, Lake Shore, Mill Dam, River Forest, Salt Springs, Silver Glen Springs, Sweetwater Cabin, and Wildcat Lake

Osceola NF—Ocean Pond and Olustee Beach. Ocean Pond campground will be enlarged.

Olustee Battlefield will be enlarged and managed for a moderate level of recreational development (MA 4.4). Expanding Ocean Pond and Olustee Battlefield will meet the future demands of an increasing population in the Jacksonville area and increase opportunities for boating, camping, fishing, hiking, and swimming. An expansion of Olustee Battlefield will permit the construction of additional recreation facilities. Currently the old railroad depot at Olustee is being restored, and the State of Florida would like to expand the battlefield area. This will increase opportunities for interpretive programs, increase protection for the heritage resources associated with the battlefield, and permit better management of the annual reenactment of the Olustee Battle.

Bottomlands of Apalachicola and Ochlockonee Rivers will be managed for moderate recreational development (MA 4.4).

On the Ocala NF, Farles Prairie, Hopkins Prairie, Zay Prairie, the area between Lake Jumper and North Prairie, and the bottomland hardwood (outside the wilderness area) along the St. Johns River on the Seminole RD will be managed for minimum development, motorized use (MA 4.2). Blackwater Swamp will be managed for low recreational development (MA 4.3). Alexander Springs Scenic Area and Sellers Lake will be managed for moderate recreational development (MA 4.4).

On the Osceola NF, Otter Bay will be managed for minimum development, nonmotorized use (MA 4.1). Impassable Bay will be managed for minimum development, motorized use (MA 4.2).

Dispersed recreation use on the forests consists of activities that usually require large areas of land or some level of isolation and quiet. Primary activities are canoeing, fishing, hiking, hunting, nature studying, primitive camping, visiting interpretive and cultural resource sites, and bicycle, horseback, and trail bike riding. Most of the primitive-type camping occurs in hunt camps during hunting season and along the Florida National Scenic Trail.

Allocating acres into recreation DFCs 4.1-4.4 would increase opportunities for dispersed recreation, especially bird-watching, hiking, nature studying, and wildlife viewing. Semiprimitive-motorized settings also would be increased.

Vehicle Use and Access Policy

This is one of the more controversial issues and the most difficult to address. Forest access policy relates to allowable travel by pedestrians, horses, and motorized and nonmotorized vehicles.

There is a high level of off-highway vehicle use on the forests. Bicycles, motorcycles, four-wheelers, and four-wheel-drive trucks use an existing network of roads and unmarked travelways. There is not a designated system of motorized trails. There are about 400 miles of nonmotorized trails with which to explore the forests. These include walking trails, equestrian trails, and bicycle trails. Cross-country travel by motorized vehicles and bicycles has been allowed. The geophysical makeup of the terrain allows easy access to the national forests.

A dense network of unmarked travelways is found within the forests. The Forest Service does not maintain these unmarked travelways.

In addition to State highways and county roads, there are about 4,000 miles of forest development roads. About 1,700 miles of local Forest Service roads have been scheduled for closure. Since 1986, approximately 397 miles have been closed. Except for roads used for access to administrative sites and recreation areas, there are very few traffic restrictions or prohibitions on the forests. Except for the situations mentioned above, all Forest Service roads are classified as constant service; that is, always open to any user.

The current permissive access policy has resulted in a maze of crisscrossing roads and travelways. Effects include user conflicts, erosion, compaction, and rutting of soils, sedimentation of streams and lakes, damage or destruction of heritage resource sites, and disturbance of sensitive wildlife species including ground-nesting birds, Florida black bears, and nesting vultures and wading birds.

In order to reduce these adverse impacts, the Revised Forest Plan prohibits cross-country travel by motorized vehicles and bicycles. This prohibition of cross-country travel is to be effective immediately upon approval of the Revised Forest Plan. Additionally, two years from the date of this decision, the following standards will go into effect:

There are three categories of areas where bicycle and motorized vehicle use varies. These areas are shown on the Access Maps in Appendix A of the Forest Plan.

1. Areas where motorized vehicles and bicycles are prohibited.

2. Areas where motorized vehicles and bicycles are restricted to open, marked, numbered roads and designated trails specified for their use.

3. Areas where motorized vehicles and bicycles are permitted to travel on open, marked, numbered roads, designated trails specified for their use, and unmarked travelways.

This delayed implementation period will allow time for a more detailed, site-specific transportation system analysis and development of a specific implementation plan. This process will include public participation and collaboration with local user groups. The Forest Service is developing a procedure for assessing and analyzing the forest transportation system for which the National Forests in Florida served as one of the pilot test forests for this procedure.

Ground-Disturbing Activities

Many people are also concerned that nonaccess-related ground disturbing activities, such as plowing firelines, mechanical site preparation for reforestation, and livestock grazing are adversely affecting biodiversity. Of particular concern is the understory of the longleaf pine-wiregrass community, where wiregrass and other native herbaceous plants

have been much reduced by such activities. To address this concern the Revised Forest Plan includes several standards and guidelines with direction to:

- Minimize the use of plowed firelines for prescribed burns and favor the use of alternatives such as disked firelines, foam, water, existing roads, or natural barriers.

- Rehabilitate new plowed firelines, unless rehabilitation will cause unacceptable damage.

- Use disked lines rather than plowed lines wherever possible, if permanent lines are needed.

- Reduce new events of ground disturbance for reasons other than restoration and close these areas to any use that may rut or erode the ground or disturb native plants.

- Promote restoration of disturbed sites and choose restoration practices that will not cause undue further degradation.

- Minimize soil disturbance when preparing sites for planting.

- Use prescribed fire as the preferred method of site preparation on longleaf and slash pine sites.

- Choose methods that minimize mortality of wiregrass on the site.

- Choose a site in which the soil has been previously disturbed, when constructing a new cultivated wildlife opening, .

A grazing demand study was conducted during the revision process which concluded that it is highly unlikely that the demand for grazing permits will increase during the next 10 years. The productivity of woodland forage limits the desirability and the economic feasibility of grazing on national forest lands in Florida. There are presently about 300 head grazing only on the Apalachicola NF. In 1987, there were more than 2,300 cattle on national forest lands in Florida.

A Revised Forest Plan standard provides that if the allotments are vacant for 5 consecutive years, the allotments will be discontinued. This would result in a gradual phase-out of the range program should the demand decline. The effects of soil compaction and disturbance from grazing is minimized by a management area standard that provides for the fencing of sensitive areas from cattle. The potential for introduction of exotic plant species is reduced by the application of a standard which requires the permittee to use practices that lessen the risk of introducing exotic plant species.

All impacts from harvesting and reforestation are controlled or ameliorated by using forestwide standards and guidelines which include Florida's Silvicultural Best Management Practices. These control measures include careful planning of location and design of harvesting activities and limiting ground disturbance in and near lakes, springs,

streams, wetlands, and other sensitive areas. The Forest Plan expands the use of the primary zone and eliminates harvesting within it under most circumstances.

Suitable Timber Land and Allowable Sale Quantity

The designation of suitable timber land (36 CFR 219.14) is found in Chapter 4 and Appendix B of the Revised Forest Plan. Land suitable for timber production is determined by both capability and appropriateness of land for growing trees on a regulated basis for industrial or consumer use. On the national forests in Florida, there are 996,957 acres tentatively suitable for timber production. Allocations of lands appropriate for timber production were made in each alternative. Alternative A would designate 653,042 acres as suitable for timber production; Alternative B, 605,724 acres; Alternative C, 823,441 acres; Alternative D, 561,008 acres; and Alternative E, 633,337 acres. The allocations are documented in Appendix B, ``Analysis Process," of the FEIS.

The ASQ of timber (36 CFR 219.16) is established in a Forest Plan. The ASQ varied by alternative based on the amount of land suitable for timber production, the harvest methods, the applicable RCW standards and the alternative themes. A timber harvest scheduling model (FORPLAN) was used to estimate the ASQ by projecting harvest, growth, and timber inventory for 200 years in the future. The documentation of this process is found in Appendix B of the FEIS. For the first 10-year period, Alternative A projects an ASQ of 101.6 MMCF (million cubic feet), Alternative B projects 82.1 MMCF, Alternative C projects 138.0 MMCF, Alternative D projects 75.1 MMCF, and Alternative E projects 103.0 MMCF.

The Revised Plan anticipates some increases in operational costs for the increased use of irregular even-aged harvest methods and uneven-aged methods. Based on current funding levels and attainment of this ASQ will require increased funding; however, the new management direction provided in the Plan can be implemented at the current budget level.

In 1986, the average annual ASQ was set at 14.1 MMCF. The average annual volume sold between 1986 and 1996 was 10.3 MMCF. I believe the Revised Forest Plan annual average ASQ of 10.3 MMCF is a reasonable level if all the plan objectives are met. I believe this is a sustainable harvest level based on the analysis in the FEIS and will contribute toward ecological restoration goals and to the economic stability of local communities.

Forest Products

People are interested in collecting a number of the natural products on the forests. All collections require a permit from the District Ranger, who sets restrictions on the quantity and location of collections. Permits may be for personal use or for commercial use and appropriate fees are collected. Some forests have established local markets and historical uses for certain products while other forests have not. A standard was developed showing the special forest products permitted for commercial harvesting on each forest. The collection of these products will be monitored closely.

For many years in the past, the removal of dead pine distillate wood (stumpwood) was a permitted and accepted practice. Stumpwood sales have not occurred since July 1991, when *National Forests in Florida* suspended the practice due to concerns about effects of the practice on threatened and endangered species. There is no new information that supports changing this decision. A standard has been included that allows for stumpwood removal within construction sites or as a part of an administrative study. The Revised Forest Plan does not make a decision to do any specific study. If a study were done to examine the effects of stumpwood removal, the results would be included in an analysis of any future proposal to permit the practice.

ALTERNATIVES

The following is a brief description of the alternatives considered in the FEIS. The fully developed alternatives, and basis for each, are detailed in the FEIS in Chapter 2, ``Comparison of Alternatives." The strength of the alternatives and of this planning process is that the alternatives express a range of concerns and issues raised by the public. The range is not based on predetermined outputs, but rather on the need to be responsive to the issues. The issues are described in detail in the FEIS, Chapter 1, ``Purpose and Need," and Appendix A, ``Summary of Public Involvement." The environmental consequences of the Revised Forest Plan and the alternatives are discussed in Chapter 3, ``Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences."

Alternatives Considered, But Eliminated From Detailed Study

We received many comments and suggestions during our scoping process and during the comment period on the Draft Environment Impact Statement and the Proposed Revised Forest Plan. All suggestions were discussed and influenced the development of the alternatives. Alternatives not considered in detail included:

1. An alternative to modify the pine management within red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) habitat management areas (HMAs) as follows: Reduce the foraging guidelines to a minimum of 1,200 stems > 10 inches within ½ mile of an RCW group; allow harvesting of 24,000 acres by the irregular shelterwood method during the next 10 years; and adopt a rotation age of 80 years for longleaf pine and 60 years for slash pine. These proposals are not consistent with the *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Management of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and its Habitat on National Forests in the Southern Region* (June 1995). We have considered alternatives which are not consistent with these guidelines, but not to the degree suggested above. Informal discussions with Regional Forest Service staff and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff indicated that such a wide variation from the Regional RCW guidelines would not be acceptable and therefore these proposals were not considered in detail.

2. An alternative proposing a significant increase in roadless areas. Although parts of this proposal are reflected in Alternatives B and D, this suggestion was not studied in detail because a roadless area review (Appendix C of the FEIS,

``Evaluation of RARE II Areas") indicated that few areas met roadless area criteria.

3. An alternative to leave the forests uncontrolled or to mimic natural processes as closely as possible. This suggestion was either too risky from the standpoint of public safety, or could have detrimental effects on private property adjacent to the forests, or was outweighed by resource values that would be lost if implemented.

4. An alternative to stop all timber cutting on the national forests in Florida. This is outside the purpose of the national forests as determined by the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 and the Organic Act of 1897.

5. An alternative was considered that would not allow for the renewal of An Interagency Agreement between the Forest Service and the U.S. Department of Navy for use of the Pinecastle Bombing Range on the Ocala NF. The agreement expires in 1999. After careful consideration, this decision was determined more appropriate to consider after conducting a site-specific analysis instead of a programmatic analysis in the plan FEIS. A separate environmental impact statement to address use of this area is being prepared by the Department of Navy and the Forest Service.

6. Alternatives with different groupings of desired future conditions (DFCs). With 31 different DFCs, a large variety of combinations would be possible. We believe that the alternatives considered in detail provide a sufficient range of feasible alternatives based on the issues, the mission of the Forest Service, and the existing conditions.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

Four preliminary alternatives were developed using a combination of desired future conditions (DFCs): Alternatives A, B, C, and D. These alternatives were described in a newsletter that was provided to the public in January 1995. In addition, public workshops were conducted in February 1995 at various locations in Florida to gather public comments. After these meetings, an additional alternative was developed, Alternative E. Based on the comments on the DEIS, the alternatives were modified, technical information corrected, the effects analysis was updated, and additional information provided where appropriate. All alternatives meet the recommended 1990 Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act program.

Some of the more significant changes between draft and final included:

- Corrections were made in some timber yield tables based on historic harvest volumes. These adjustments resulted in an increased estimate in the timber volumes from sand pine harvests and a decrease in volumes from longleaf and slash pine uneven-aged harvests. As a result, since most of the forest harvest is in sand pine, the total volume estimated in each alternative increased from draft to final.

- Scrub-jay habitat indices changed by including values for unsuitable timberlands and considering different values for larger opening sizes. Also, in Alternative E, sand pine harvest was programmed to be level or increasing during the next 50 years.

- Irregular shelterwood harvest was added in the first and second periods. Also, in Alternative E, longleaf pine restoration by slash pine removal was added and group selection was reduced on the Osceola NF.

- In Alternative E, the Lake Bradford Tract was added as a special interest area and the candidate savannahs RNA where changed to special interest areas on the Apalachicola NF. The Middle Prong of the St. Mary's River special interest area was expanded on the Osceola NF.

- The area where motorized vehicles and bicycles are restricted to marked, numbered roads and designated trails was expanded on the Apalachicola NF.

- In Alternative E, language was incorporated to provide for gradual phase-out of the range program should demand continue to decrease.

- The Monitoring Chapter in the Revised Plan has been changed to include several additional Management Indicator Species.

Selected Alternative (Alternative E)

In this alternative, adaptive management is emphasized in restoring and maintaining native ecosystems, while providing for balanced human use. This alternative recognizes the importance of ecological processes, has a high emphasis on restoring the longleaf pine-wiregrass ecosystem, and provides a range of recreational services.

All Three Forests

The forests would move toward a diverse patch size structure in longleaf and slash pine.

Off-site slash pine and sand pine would be restored to the appropriate species, usually longleaf pine.

Hardwood/cypress would be unsuitable for timber production.

Cross-country travel by motorized vehicles or bicycles would not be permitted.

Areas would be established where motorized vehicles and bicycles would be restricted to designated trails or open, numbered roads. Other areas would be established where motorized vehicles and bicycles could travel on unmarked travelways, designated trails and open, numbered roads. This policy will go into effect 2 years after plan approval to allow for development of specific access plans for each forest with public participation.

Some roads would be scheduled for closure, and some roads would be converted to trails.

Apalachicola National Forest

Clear Lake wilderness study area (WSA) would be recommended for wilderness.

New River and Ochlockonee River would be recommended as wild and scenic rivers.

Additional lands would be managed as special interest areas.

Areas would be managed for moderate recreational development.

The entire forest would be within RCW HMAs. Foraging requirements would be reduced by one-third on the Apalachicola RD.

Cattle grazing would be permitted on a portion of the Apalachicola RD. Allotments vacant for 5 consecutive years would be discontinued.

An urban interface area would be designated on the east side of the forest.

Ocala National Forest

Juniper Prairie Wilderness would be recommended for expansion.

Alexander Springs Creek and Juniper Creek would be recommended as wild and scenic rivers.

Several areas would be managed for a range of dispersed recreational opportunities.

RCW HMAs would include approximately forty percent of the longleaf/slash pine management areas.

An area of the sand pine - oak scrub forest would be managed to allow up to 320 acre openings where natural regeneration would be emphasized.

Most of the sand pine - oak scrub forest would be managed to allow up to 160 acre openings, and natural regeneration would be encouraged.

An area would be managed as oak scrub for the primary use of the scrub-jay.

Osceola National Forest

Natural Area would be recommended for release as a WSA.

A portion of Pinhook Swamp would be managed as a remote wetland.

Additional lands would be managed as special interest areas.

Olustee Battlefield would be enlarged and managed for a moderate level of recreational development.

Ocean Pond campground would be enlarged.

Most of the forest would be within an RCW HMA, except Pinhook Swamp.

Cattle grazing would be permitted on a portion of the forest. Allotments vacant for 5 consecutive years would be discontinued.

Alternative A

Alternative A reflects the current plan and is the ``no action'' or ``no revision'' alternative. Management would continue as directed in the 1986 Forest Plan, as amended.

Alternative B

In this alternative, forest management activities would be based ecologically and would be intended to restore and maintain native ecosystems. Human use of the forests would be subordinate to other biological needs.

All Three Forests

The forests would move toward a diverse patch size structure in longleaf and slash pine.

Off-site slash pine and sand pine would be restored to the appropriate species, usually longleaf pine.

Hardwood/cypress would be unsuitable for timber production.

Cross-country motorized travel would not be permitted.

Motorized vehicles could travel on marked trails that are designated for their use.

Some roads would be scheduled for closure.

Apalachicola National Forest

Clear Lake WSA would be recommended for wilderness.

New River and Ochlockonee River would be recommended as wild and scenic rivers.

Savannah RNA would be expanded.

Several areas would be managed for a range of dispersed recreational opportunities.

RCW HMAs would be the same as in the selected alternative.

Cattle grazing would be permitted on a portion of the Apalachicola RD.

Ocala National Forest

Juniper Prairie Wilderness would be recommended for expansion.

Alexander Springs Creek and Juniper Creek would be recommended as wild and scenic rivers.

Additional lands would be recommended as RNAs.

Silver Glen Springs would be converted from a developed recreation area to a special interest area.

RCW HMAs would be the same as in the selected alternative.

Most of the sand pine - oak scrub forest would be managed to allow up to 160 acre openings, and natural regeneration would be encouraged.

Osceola National Forest

Natural Area would be recommended for release as a wilderness study area.

Impassable Bay and a portion of Pinhook Swamp would be managed as remote wetlands.

Additional lands would be recommended as RNAs.

RCW HMA would be the same as in the selected alternative.

Cattle grazing would be permitted on a portion of the forest.

Alternative C

In this alternative, the forest would be managed to produce a high level of commodities while maintaining the health of the ecosystem.

All Three Forests

The forests would continue to have the current patch size structure.

Off-site slash pine and sand pine would be restored to the appropriate species, usually longleaf pine.

Most hardwood/cypress would be suitable for timber production.

Motorized vehicles could travel cross-country in an open area.

Motorized vehicles could travel on an unmarked travelway in an open area.

No roads would be scheduled for closure.

Apalachicola National Forest

Clear Lake WSA would be recommended for release as a wilderness study area.

New River and Ochlockonee River would not be recommended as wild and scenic rivers.

The entire forest would be within RCW HMAs. Foraging habitat requirements would be reduced by one-third on the Apalachicola RD.

Cattle grazing would be permitted on a portion of the Apalachicola RD.

An area near Tallahassee would be managed to provide wood fiber for energy production.

Ocala National Forest

RCW HMAs would be the same as in the selected alternative.

Shorter timber rotations would occur outside RCW HMAs.

Most of the sand pine - oak scrub forest would be managed to allow up to 160 acre openings, and natural regeneration would be encouraged.

Osceola National Forest

Natural Area would be recommended for release as a wilderness study area.

RCW HMA would be the same as in the selected alternative.

Cattle grazing would be permitted on a portion of the forest.

Alternative D

In this alternative, the emphasis is on providing a wide range of recreational opportunities with a focus on dispersed, primitive and semiprimitive settings.

All Three Forests

Hardwood/cypress would be unsuitable for timber production.

Off-site slash pine and sand pine would be restored to the appropriate species, usually longleaf pine.

Cattle grazing would not be permitted.

Cross-country motorized travel would not be permitted.

Motorized vehicles could travel on marked trails that are designated for their use.

This alternative would designate a higher density of motorized trails than Alternatives B and E. Some trails may be only open during hunting season.

Some roads would be scheduled for closure.

Apalachicola National Forest

Clear Lake WSA would be recommended for wilderness.

New River and Ochlockonee River would be recommended as wild and scenic rivers.

Savannah RNA would be expanded slightly.

The entire forest would be within RCW HMAs.

On the Apalachicola RD, the forest would move toward a diverse patch size structure. On the Wakulla RD, the forest would continue to have the current patch size structure.

Cattle grazing would not be permitted.

Ocala National Forest

Little Lake George Wilderness and Juniper Prairie Wilderness would be recommended for expansion.

Alexander Springs Creek and Juniper Creek would be recommended as wild and scenic rivers.

RCW HMAs would be the same as in the preferred alternative.

An area of the sand pine - oak scrub forest would be managed to allow up to 320 acre openings where natural regeneration would be emphasized.

Most of the sand pine - oak scrub forest would be managed to allow up to 120 acre openings, and artificial regeneration would be encouraged.

Two areas would be managed as oak scrub, primarily for the use of scrub-jays.

Osceola National Forest

Natural Area WSA and a portion of Pinhook Swamp would be recommended for wilderness.

Olustee Battlefield would be enlarged and managed for a moderate level of recreational development.

The entire area surrounding Ocean Pond would be managed for developed recreation emphasis.

The RCW HMA would be the same as in the selected alternative.

A portion of the forest would move toward a diverse patch size structure and a portion would continue with the current patch size structure.

Table 2 shows a comparison of allocations and outputs by alternative.

Table 2

Summary of Outputs and Allocations
First 10-Year Period

Allocation/Output	Unit	Alternatives				
		A	B	C	D	E
Land Suitable for Timber Production	Percent	57	53	71	49	55
Allowable Sale Quantity	MMCF	101.6	82.1	138.0	75.1	103.0
Research Natural Areas	Acre	870	43,344	870	2,308	870
Remote Management Areas	Acre	0	22,256	0	0	17,166
Special Interest Areas	Acre	16,804	15,220	17,293	41,957	15,152
Recreational Emphasis Areas	Acre	7,640	37,414	7,582	117,398	37,078
Wild and Scenic Rivers	Mile	47.6	178.6	47.6	178.6	178.6
Wilderness	Acre	74,551	80,186	74,551	114,155	80,186
Longleaf-Wiregrass Restoration	Acre	1,860	10,086	12,813	10,297	19,779
Uneven-aged Regeneration	Acre	0	19,033	0	5,352	32,500
Even-aged Regeneration	Acre	2,097	0	5,566	1,384	1,878
Sand Pine Regeneration	Acre	49,820	32,341	40,895	30,861	40,000
Pine Thinning	Acre	56,054	52,069	51,887	30,684	52,015

MMCF - million cubic feet

Environmentally Preferable Alternatives

The Council on Environmental Quality has defined the ``environmentally preferable'' alternatives as:

> . . . the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA's section 101. Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources.

In most of Florida's ecosystems, disturbance does not result in damage to natural disturbance. Indeed, the lack of disturbance can be damaging. For example, the longleaf pine-wiregrass community has declined to less than 5 percent of their original acreage across all ownerships. This reduction is due to in part to fire exclusion. Another example is the sand pine-scrub ecosystem which is perpetuated by large, catastrophic fires. Because of the extensive interface with private land throughout the forests and human health and safety concerns, wildfire no longer plays its natural role in these ecosystems. In order to restore and maintain these ecosystems, active management is required such as prescribed burning, tree removal, reforestation with the proper species and other vegetation management techniques.

I believe that the appropriate interpretation of CEQ's definition of the environmentally preferable alternative for *National Forests in Florida* is one which promotes ecological restoration goals. All of the alternatives considered fulfill these goals to some extent. Alternative D provides the least disturbance by scheduling the lowest level of active management; however, that alternative also has a lower level of longleaf pine-wiregrass community restoration and provides the least amount of suitable scrub jay habitat.

I believe Alternative E provides the best overall approach to ecosystem restoration and is environmentally preferred. Alternative E provides a high level of prescribed burning, a non-declining flow of suitable scrub jay habitat and the highest level of longleaf pine-wiregrass community restoration.

Net Public Benefits

I selected Alternative E because it best addresses ecological restoration needs, and provides better overall ecological and social benefits than any other alternative. Although Alternative E does not generate as many market valued commodities relative to costs as some of the other alternatives, this alternative recognizes the importance of ecological processes, has a high emphasis on restoring the longleaf pine-wiregrass ecosystem, and provides a high level of recreational opportunities. Alternative E better addresses public concerns about recreation, wildlife, and forest management strategies.

In summary, Alternative E does not cause the least disturbance of the environment, nor does it have the highest present net worth of the alternatives considered. However, I believe Alternative E achieves a balance between the economic and environmental issues

and concerns voiced by the public, within the physical and biological capability of the land. Most important, I am confident that this alternative can be implemented without reducing that capability.

Compatibility

The Revised Forest Plan has been developed with public participation and involvement, coordination, and comments from Federal, State, and local agencies—including the U.S. Department of Interior Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Florida Bureau of State Planning, Florida Commissioner of Education, Florida Committee of Natural Resources, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs, Florida Department of Commerce, Florida Department of Community Affairs, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Department of Natural Resources, Florida Department of Transportation, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, and Florida Governor's Council on Indian Affairs—and representatives of local county and city governments.

Many efforts were made to ensure that the preferred alternative considered the goals of other public agencies as they relate to national forest management. Comments from letters were reviewed and analyzed extensively; meetings and field trips were conducted with officials from other agencies, and actions were taken to address their concerns. I believe the preferred alternative is compatible with and complementary to the goals of other agencies.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE AND BUDGETS

The Revised Forest Plan will be implemented through a series of project-level decisions based on site-specific environmental analysis and public involvement. The Revised Forest Plan seeks to guide determination of management activities and projects by establishing a clear desired future condition for the forest and for each management area, rather than by establishing schedules for actions. This approach should leave more flexibility for managers to adapt program and project selection as changes take place in budgets, resource capabilities, and management priorities.

Those projects recognized in the implementation guides and strategies in the Revised Forest Plan in Chapter 5 and in the probable outputs listed in Appendix F, ``Summary of Allocations, Outputs, and Budget," are projections of probable outcomes that were used to indicate approximate scheduling and practices and estimate the environmental effects of each alternative.

The Revised Forest Plan purposefully avoids determining activity schedules and addresses the estimated budget as an appendix rather than within the Revised Forest Plan itself in an effort to decrease the need for future amendments solely for scheduling and budget changes.

I realize that the estimated annual budget to fully implement the Revised Forest Plan is higher than recent past budget levels. However, while future total annual budgets may remain relatively flat, some program area funding may increase while others decrease. This Revised Forest Plan sets high goals in all program areas. As program area budgets

fluctuate, project priorities will be determined by criteria such as progress toward the desired future condition, maximization of resource capabilities, and project coordination with partners and cooperators. In addition, we anticipate that the receipts from recreation sites assist in funding expansions. We currently work with various partners and cooperators to develop and implement resource management projects. We will continue to develop these relationships and to foster other partnerships to improve on the ground management and improve public ownership in national forest management.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The monitoring and evaluation program is the quality-control system for a Forest Plan. This program is described in Chapter 5, ``Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Implementation,'' of the Revised Forest Plan. Monitoring and evaluation receive major emphasis in this revision and will provide us with information on the progress we achieve in obtaining management goals and objectives. This information will be evaluated and used to update inventory data, to improve current and future mitigation measures, and to assess the need for amending or revising the Revised Forest Plan. Thorough evaluation of monitoring results is directly linked to the decision maker's ability to respond to changing conditions, emerging trends, public concerns, and new information and technology. No single monitoring item or parameter automatically triggers a change in Revised Forest Plan direction. An interdisciplinary, holistic approach is used to evaluate information and decide what changes are needed.

Specific monitoring questions are identified and directly linked to Revised Forest Plan goals, desired future conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, and specific regulatory requirements. Every goal, objective, standard, and guideline cannot be monitored. Relevancy to issues, compliance with legal and agency policy, scientific credibility, administrative feasibility, long- and short-term budget considerations, and impact on work force all influence monitoring priorities. High priority monitoring items include those listed in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) biological opinion on the Revised forest Plan and monitoring effects and assumptions for uneven-aged management. Various approaches may be used to monitor and evaluate the forest-wide status and trends of habitats and populations for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species or for those species selected as management indicator species. The monitoring approaches identified for the management indicator species in the Forest Plan, Chapter 5, meet the intent of 36 CFR 219 Planning Regulations.

Each monitoring question has a monitoring item to answer the question. For each monitoring question, a monitoring task sheet has been developed. These task sheets are used to develop the details, priorities, and budgeting for answering the monitoring questions. The task sheets are not part of my decision but are in the Revised Forest Plan in Appendix E, ``Monitoring Tasks,'' for information. Changes to task sheets will not require a Forest Plan amendment.

Public participation is vital as we monitor our progress. We will work with partners and cooperators in developing and carrying out monitoring activities. Activities, findings, and results will be shared with the public at least annually. The public will be invited to review the results and recommend changes based on monitoring findings, emerging issues or new information.

MITIGATION

Mitigation measures are an integral part of the forestwide standards and guidelines listed in the Revised Forest Plan in Chapter 3 and of the management area guidelines listed in Chapter 4. These mitigation measures were developed through an interdisciplinary effort and contain measures necessary to avoid, minimize, rectify, reduce, eliminate, or compensate for possible adverse environmental effects. Many of the standards and guidelines are incorporated by reference from other documents. These documents include:

- *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact for Standards and Guidelines for the Southern Regional Guide* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, June 1984)
- *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Suppression of the Southern Pine Beetle, Southern Region* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, April 1987)
- *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for Vegetation Management in the Coastal Plain/Piedmont* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, February 1989)
- *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Management of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and its Habitat on National Forests in the Southern Region* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, June 1995)

Projects implemented under the authority of the Revised Forest Plan will be conducted in compliance with all laws, regulations, and policies governing activities on national forest land. All management activities will comply with the State of Florida Best Management Practices. These Best Management Practices are designed primarily to protect water quality as required by Section 208 of the Clean Water Act.

Additional mitigation measures may be developed and implemented at the project level consistent with the measures identified in Chapter 3 of the FEIS and Chapters 3 and 4 of the Revised Forest Plan.

Use of mitigation measures will be monitored as an integral part of the Revised Forest Plan monitoring program and changes made if monitoring results indicate a need.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT SECTION 7 CONSULTATION

This decision is made with the benefit of extensive consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the Revised Forest Plan and EIS. Formal consultation was initiated on September 21, 1998 and completed with the final biological opinion of December 18, 1998. The USFWS was provided advanced copies of the Revised Forest Plan, FEIS and the Biological Assessment (BA). The BA assessed effects to federally designated proposed, threatened or endangered species that occur or could occur on the

Forests. In a biological opinion and conference report, the USFWS concurred with the Forest Service's determination of effects in the BA (See Appendix F of the FEIS). The Forest Service determined that implementation of the Revised Forest Plan ``may affect'' 11 species. The USFWS biological opinion is that the implementation of the Revised Forest Plan is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the 11 species with a determination of ``may affect''. The biological opinion included ``incidental take'' statements for five species in which ``take'' is anticipated. The USFWS identified several reasonable and prudent measures to minimize ``take'' including:

- Implement an educational program for timber contractors for the purpose of reducing intentional killing of eastern indigo snakes;

- Implement the Forestwide Standard and Guidelines for Gopher Tortoise and its Burrow Commensals;

- Take every effort to protect RCW cavity trees during prescribed burning operations;

- Implement the monitoring study on the Apalachicola NF as described in the Biological Assessment;

- Implement Florida scrub-jay monitoring studies on the Ocala NF;

- Implement the Standards and Guidelines in the Plan;

- Implement the Forestwide Standards and Guidelines for Flatwoods Salamander.

Further consultation with USFWS will be part of site-specific evaluations for project-level decisions;

PLAN AMENDMENTS

The Revised Forest Plan is a dynamic instrument that can be changed with appropriate public involvement and environmental analysis. Through the life of the Revised Forest Plan, amendments may be needed to incorporate new information, new policy and direction, or changing values and resource conditions. Amendments will keep the Forest Plan current, relevant, and responsive to agency and public concerns. Amendments are needed whenever any of the Revised Forest Plan decisions should be changed due to any of the above conditions. The Revised Forest Plan also can be amended for specific projects if during project design it is determined that the best method of meeting goals and objective conflicts with existing standards and guidelines.

Amendments may be significant or nonsignificant. The Forest Supervisor may implement nonsignificant amendments to the Revised Forest Plan after appropriate public involvement and environmental analysis. Significant amendments are approved by the Regional Forester.

APPEAL RIGHTS IMPLEMENTATION DATE AND APPROVAL

This decision may be appealed in accordance with the provisions of 36 CFR 217 by filing a written notice of appeal within 90 days of the date of publication of the legal notice. The appeal must be filed with the Reviewing Officer:

Express Mail:

USDA - Forest Service
Attn: Appeals Office, NFS-3NW
201 14th Street NW
Washington DC 20250

Regular Mail:

USDA - Forest Service
Attn: Appeals Office, NFS-3NW
PO Box 96090
Washington DC 20290-6090

The notice of appeal must include sufficient narrative evidence and argument to show why this decision should be changed or reversed (36 CFR 217.9). Requests to stay the approval of this Land and Resource Management Plan shall not be granted (36 CFR 217.10(b)).

The Forest Plan will be implemented 30 days after the Notice of Availability of the Forest Plan, FEIS, and Record of Decision appear in the *Federal Register*. All new permits, contracts, and other instruments for the use and occupancy of National Forest System lands and resources uses must conform with the Revised Forest Plan. Permits, contracts, and other instruments that were in existence prior to implementation will be reviewed (if needed), subject to valid existing rights. No decisions on site-specific projects are made in this document. Those projects identified in the Revised Forest Plan or FEIS as probable activities are only included to indicate approximate scheduling and practices and to estimate effects. Final decisions on site-specific projects will be made after site-specific analysis and documentation in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

I encourage anyone concerned about the Revised Forest Plan or FEIS or who would like more information to contact:

Marsha Kearney
Forest Supervisor
National Forests in Florida
325 John Knox Rd. Suite F-100
Tallahassee, FL 32303-4160

Elizabeth Estill *March 29, 1999*

ELIZABETH ESTILL Date
Regional Forester
Southern Region, USDA Forest Service